

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application.

1. (Currently amended) A process for the stabilization and disinfection of sludge wherein raw sludge having a dry matter content of from 3 to 7 % by weight is fed continuously or quasi-continuously into a first stage, ~~where~~ during which it remains for an average retention time of three to ten days under aerobic-thermophilic conditions to obtain a partially stabilized sludge, and wherein if the raw sludge is fed quasi-continuously the time between two chargings of the first stage is not longer than 12 hours; and

said partially stabilized sludge is fed into a second stage ~~in~~ during which disinfection of the partially stabilized sludge is effected at temperatures of at least 50 °C, wherein prior to discharging, there is no charging until said partially stabilized sludge has been disinfected.

2. (Original) The process according to claim 1, wherein said partially stabilized sludge from the first stage is continuously or quasi-continuously fed into an intermediate storage tank, from which it is fed batchwise to the second stage.

3. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 1, wherein the average retention time in the second stage is at least two days.

4. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 1, wherein the sludge is agitated in the first and/or second stages.
5. (Canceled)
6. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 1, wherein the time between two chargings of the first stage is not longer than 6 hours.
7. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 1, wherein no charging is effected for at least four hours.
8. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 1, wherein the amount of oxygen supplied in the first or second stage is controlled depending on parameters selected from the group of:
 - charged amount of raw sludge;
 - redox potential in the sludge;
 - oxygen content in the sludge;
 - oxygen content in the exhaust gas; and
 - CO₂ content in the exhaust gas.
9. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 1, wherein the temperature in the second stage is within a range of from 50 to 65 °C and is controlled by supplying or withdrawing heat.

10. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 1, wherein the aerobically stabilized and disinfected sludge is subsequently further treated physically, chemically and/or biologically.

11. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 1, wherein exhaust gas released in the process is recovered and treated physically, chemically and/or biologically.

12. (Currently amended) The process according to claim 1, wherein a device is used for the aerobic-thermophilic stabilization and disinfection of sludge comprising:

a raw sludge tank for the continuous or quasi-continuous charging of raw sludge, which is-a for the first stage;

a disinfection tank for disinfecting the partially stabilized sewage sludge, which is-a for the second stage; and

a conveying means provided between the raw sludge tank and the disinfection tank for the batchwise conveying of sludge into the disinfection tank.

13. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 12, further comprising an intermediate tank provided between the raw sludge tank and the disinfection tank and connected with both tanks, a first conveyor for the continuous or quasi-continuous conveying of partially stabilized sludge from the raw sludge tank into the intermediate tank, and a second conveyor for conveying sludge from the intermediate tank into the disinfection tank.

14. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 12, comprising at least two disinfection tanks connected with the raw sludge tank, wherein one closing means is provided for each disinfection tank, so that at least one of the disinfection tanks can be closed while at least one other disinfection tank is open for being continuously or quasi-continuously filled.

15. (Previously presented) The process according to claim 12, wherein said raw sludge tank, disinfection tank and/or intermediate tank have an agitation device and/or an aeration device and/or an exhaust device and/or a heat exchanger.